Gigantic U.S. Intelligence Apparatus In Question After Laos, Other Fiascos

High Margin of Error, Secret Policy-Making By CIA Cited — Book Details Some Cases.

By MARQUIS W. CHILDS
Chief Washington Correspondent of the Post-Dispatch.

WASHINGTON, May 19.

IT WAS just two years ago that President Eisenhower returned from Paris after being subjected by Premier Khrushchev to the violent and humiliating attack that blew up the long awaited summit meeting.

That was the aftermath of the shooting down of the U-2 espionage plane 1300 miles inside the Soviet Union. And the disaster to the U-2 with the capture of the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, set in motion a chain of consequences only dimly understood in the two years that have passed.

Ever since World War II a mysterious X called "intelligence" has figured in American policy decisions. A huge intelligence apparatus has come into being. While part of this apparatus is exposed to public view, as in the big headquarters that the Central Intelligence Agency has built on the Potomac river near Washington, the mysterious reports of the CIA and military intelligence are always shrouded in secrecy.

DESPITE efforts to cut it back and coordinate it on the military side, there is a strong suspicion that the intelligence tail has more often than not wagged the policy dog. A look backward at intelligence evaluations on which presumably major decisions have been based, raises substantial doubt as to whether this overbalancing influence—formed on information always denied to the public and in certain instances even to officials of the government—is wise.

The margin of error seems always to have been on the optimistic side. This goes from the estimate of when the Soviet Union would obtain the atomic bomb, a misjudgment of anywhere from four to 20 years, depending on the intelligence source, to the Cuban fiasco and the informed conclusion that the landing of 1200 Cuban patriots at the Bay of Pigs would touch off a successful uprising against Fidel Castro.

It covers the recent events in Southeast Asia. Largely through the machinations of the CIA a "strong man," Phoumi Nosavan, was put in power in Laos. He has proved to be strong chiefly in pressing ever larger demands on the United States. As recently as a year ago or less, military intelligence was testing the Royal Laotian Army as an effective military force. While disillusion seems to have set in, there is reason to wonder whether anyone was prepared for the flight from Nam Tha led by the Royal Laotian generals.

The answer of the CIA is that their successes must necessarily be kept secret while their failures are advertised to the world. But if the successes cannot be known, surely something can be learned from the disasters. A book just published, "The U-2 Affair," by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, breaks through official secrecy and the wrappings of the official coverup to show how little the President or anyone else in high authority actually controlled the operation and how disastrous were the consequences growing out of the bungled way in which the affair was handled once the plane was reported missing.

The CIA's answer is that the [illegible] of photographs of the Soviet Union made in the four or five years before [illegible] downed more than [illegible] for the final tragedy. But any [illegible] operation may have had on policy [illegible] undetectable. The authors of "The U-2 [illegible]" say that policy-makers [illegible] genuine control of the [illegible] spring of 1960 and zealous [illegible] to get "just one [illegible] actually in charge. They reach the following conclusion:

"There is no substantiated evidence of any sort of conspiracy to scuttle the summit. But it is clear that many important persons in the intelligence field were more concerned with the U-2 as a valuable instrument of espionage than with its possible effect on the summit. In other words, they were worried not so much that the U-2 might endanger the summit as that the summit might endanger the U-2. By May of 1960, intelligence had come to dominate policy in the U-2 program. Instead of serving as a basis for policy-making, intelligence-gathering had become an end in itself."

The CIA has virtually completed the move from Washington to the new building that rises like a big white cliff on the Potomac. How many employes are housed there is, of course, secret. But it can be stated that the building has one million square feet of floor space, making it a little less than a third the size of the Pentagon. Despite this scope, the CIA is retaining its headquarters building in Washington. Thus the intelligence tail, judging from the few external glimpses that are permitted, appears to be growing larger rather than smaller. Whether it will wag the policy dog in appraising the perilous and uncertain power balance in Southeast Asia between China and Russia is a profoundly [illegible] question.

[illegible] CIA expanded to its present size and [illegible] operation under Allen Dulles, [illegible] as deputy director beginning in [illegible] and [illegible] as director starting in 1953. [illegible] in a sense a symbolic figure. He

Cont